



Inside CFSA



News for partners of the D.C. Child and Family Services Agency

Brenda Donald Walker, Interim Director

Congress Tests Social Worker Retention Incentive in D.C.

Qualified participants get all or part of student loan repaid—if they stay on the job

On June 21, CFSA began accepting applications for the Social Worker Loan Repayment Program (LRP), an experiment to see whether repaying all or a portion of student loans for BSW or MSW degrees keeps case-carrying child welfare workers on the job longer. Social worker retention is a major challenge for every child welfare agency in the nation. In FY04, Congress appropriated \$3 million to CFSA for a social worker retention pilot program with student loan repayment as the incentive. The local pilot is similar to incentive programs underway or being tested in Federal agencies to attract recent college graduates and to keep newer employees in public service.

"The District is fortunate to have been chosen to pilot this program," said CFSA Interim Director Brenda Donald Walker. "Although this is a limited, one-time test, local social workers who qualify can get all or part of their student loan repaid. Congress has not yet opened this opportunity anywhere else in the country. We're the first child welfare system to try out this benefit through a special Congressional appropriation."

CFSA and Private-Agency Social Workers May Participate

Under Congressional mandates attached to the funding and administrative guidelines CFSA has developed, case-carrying social workers employed by CFSA or private agencies under contract to CFSA may apply to the program if they:

- Have already worked—or will have worked—full time as a licensed, non-supervisory, case-carrying social worker for two years as of September 3, 2004.
- Have an outstanding, verifiable educational loan for their BSW or MSW degree from a financial institution or other formal source (not family or friends).
- Are willing to sign a service agreement to work two additional years in a case-carrying capacity for their current employer.

During the second two years of service, CFSA will make student loan payments directly to each qualified social worker's lending institution. Half will be made at the end of the first year and the other half at the end of the second year—providing the social worker remains on the job.

Making the Most of Pilot Funding

CFSA did some fancy math to stretch the Congressional appropriation to cover as many qualified social workers as possible. Maximum payment levels are expected to be between \$4,000 and \$5,000 for eligible BSWs and between \$8,000 and \$10,000 for eligible MSWs, depending on the number of applicants who qualify for the pilot program. However, if the amount of an outstanding student loan is less than the maximum payment level for its category (BSW or MSW), the social worker can receive no more than the amount of the outstanding loan.

While CFSA anticipates funding will be sufficient to provide loan repayments to all qualified applicants, loan repayment amounts and the number of social workers who can ultimately participate depend on the total number of qualified applicants. If the number of qualified applicants exceeds pilot program funding limits, CFSA will use a lottery system to fill available slots with eligible applicants.

Penalties

Participants who fail to complete the period of services required to receive their first student loan repayment will automatically forfeit their place in the program. Participants who receive the first installment of their loan repayment but fail to complete the period of service required to receive the second installment will be responsible for repaying CFSA for all funds they previously received through the program.

Information and Applications

More information about CFSA's Social Worker Loan Repayment Pilot Program is available from LRP Project Manager Wendy Jacobson at (202) 724-7437 or wjacobson@cfsa-dc.org. Deadline for applications is August 16, 2004. Deadline for eligible applicants to sign their two-year service agreement is September 3, 2004. ■



CFSA Public Information faxes this newsletter monthly to agency providers and other partners. To provide comments or to update your fax number, call (202) 442-6015. Editor: Mindy Good ■